

Thrivability

The world needs the
best version of you



Thrivability

The world needs the best version of you. Especially now, in these turbulent times, you need full brain power, emotional agility, a clear purpose and lots of energy. Why? To adapt to new circumstances, connect deeply with others, explore new ways and find new answers to meaningful challenges. We believe it matters to invest in thrivability, the ability to thrive!

Human energy, performance and happiness aren't magic. They're about synchronizing routines to create a meaningful, focused and energized life, instead of a draining one. Shaping your life and your relationships and feeling you're making a difference. Not only will you feel happier, other people are more attracted to you as well and you just get more done. And we believe these times make fertile ground to cultivate fresh routines and increase your personal effectiveness.

A lot of people tend to believe that they are not good enough. Our deficit-oriented schooling and performance systems only enhance these feelings. We often play by the system and try not to lose out. We have all kinds of excuses, preventing us to live life to the fullest.

With this white paper we hope to inspire you with new ideas, perspectives and routines that will help you thrive in life. The art of transforming your life is all about tiny decisions and actions. By activating new routines, you will increase your thrivability and become

the best version of yourself. We experience that people who are thriving are more engaged, resilient, creative and productive. And they experience aliveness and are healthier as well.

We believe it has a lot to do with growing and aligning four domains in our lives. We need to grow and align our brain power, emotional agility, physical renewal with a thriving spirit. In the following chapters we will dive deeper into our spiritual, mental, emotional and physical well-being. We'll finish off with a chapter on effective behavior change, because we need to understand how to make it sustainable when we undertake the journey towards a more thriving life.

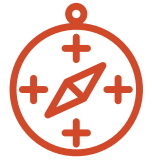
Our intention with this white paper is to provide you with a map, allowing you to have fundamental conversations with yourself, based on ancient wisdom, modern science, and human experience. Because we want you to get to the core of your life and find your way toward a more thriving life.

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We are born as unique individuals, but most of us die a copy of someone else.”

- Pablo Picasso

1.0 How to ignite a thriving spirit



1.1 Finding YOUR way

Our times require people to navigate through fast-changing environments. People that do the right things for the right reasons. People who can connect, take hard decisions and make a real contribution to the recovery and renewal of our organizations and society. Are you able to navigate through the creative tension between your vision of the future and where you are right now? Did you know that our brain is better in dealing with the future than with the past? Our behavior is heavily influenced by our vision of the future. More than it is shaped by our past experiences. Therefore, we start with our ability to aspire, hope and visualize our future.

To get there, you need to follow the inward path to what you profoundly care about. And lose yourself completely in the service of what you have found. Philosopher Charles Taylor defines authenticity as: 'There is a certain way of being human that is my way. I am called upon to live my life in this way, and not to imitate anyone else's life. But this notion gives a new importance to being true to myself. If I am not, I miss the point of my life; I miss what being human is for me.' With this, Taylor says that everybody has their own way and their own calling in life.

Being human means to choose to realize your own way and calling. Measuring up to the (assumed) expectations of others, while your inner voice tells you not to, results in not being true to yourself. This usually leads to a loss of quality of life, involvement and happiness. And being even more honest, it contributes to an increasing amount of depression, burnouts and other illnesses. In a way, we're talking about integrity: the determination to remain true to yourself. Staying true to yourself does not mean using the words 'that's just who I am' to excuse yourself out of growing into your potential. The best way to honor yourself and everyone you care about, is to be that potential in thought, word and deed.

We need to remain authentic, allowing ourselves to be touched, to keep on caring and to start the profound conversations that make us human. To thrive and live a meaningful life, you must know what is meaningful to you. If you do not already have a clearly defined purpose, this is your starting point. Focus on what fulfills you, what brings meaning to your life and why this is relevant to you and possibly to others? What motivates you intrinsically? What past significant moments and experiences have guided you toward this direction? The spiritual domain is where you acknowledge, remember and redefine your internal compass to help you navigate and align your habits in the other domains.



Erik-Jan: 'A few years ago, I had a profound reflection. Underneath my usual steady appearance, it felt like I lost something that used to fuel me deeply. My will and drive to be a leader, to take initiative, to stand up for causes I believe in. The reflection was about how I was leading my own life, but also about the way I was serving others with what I had to offer. Reflecting about it made me see that I believed I

needed to be strong to save the day, instead of walking my own path and confronting others with their responsibilities. I completely disregarded the pain and disappointments in my life. It resulted in a lack of direction, unawareness of my influence and not living my purpose. Looking back, it was easy to sum up the disappointing moments, the failures and harmful moments. And though I was not aware of it, these experiences had a stronger effect on me than I thought. I was living with the brakes on, with a false sense of modesty and mostly with a lack of focus and determination to do what matters most to me. By acknowledging this, the insecurity faded and a new sense of wholeness and kindness towards myself appeared. It felt like a second chance. A second chance to stand up for what I deeply believe in and want to contribute to, despite the burdening experiences of the past. Nelson Mandela once said: 'Do not judge me by my successes, judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again.' This is what I'm reliving. The moments that I fell made me into who I am right now.'

Simply put, we see the spiritual domain as keeping the main thing, the main thing. So, what is your main thing, your why, your reason for waking up inspired every day? What do you want to cause in life? Without that, why bother about anything in life, let alone work? When we start to wonder about these questions, our soul begins to awaken. According to high-performance psychologist Michael Gervais, fulfillment in life comes from thinking about the bigger questions. Take a moment to reflect on your purpose. What is yours and how much clarity do you have about it?



To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment."

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

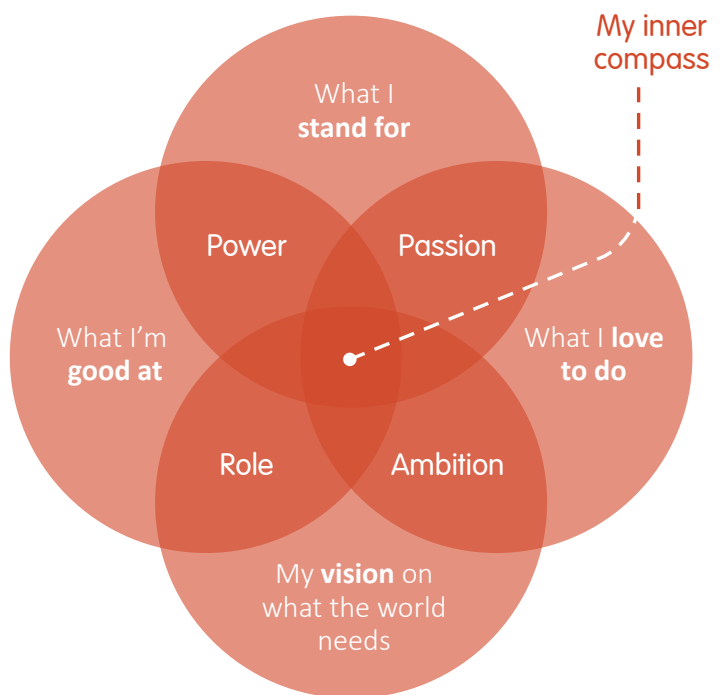
1.2 Switching from 'I have to' to 'I want to'

Trying to be picture perfect is something of all ages. In the past, we had institutions that gave us guidelines on how to live a meaningful life. And we could blame the institutions, if we were not happy. Nowadays the responsibility is shifting towards the individual. Therefore, feeling lost, confused, hurt, disappointed, or other depleting emotions could lead to the realization that there is something wrong with your picture of your life. And that you alone are responsible for it. Leadership and human performance expert dr. Alan Watkins calls this: 'the disease of meaning': Doing what you think society wants you to do, but realizing it doesn't create a feeling of lasting happiness and fulfillment. Picasso once said: 'we are born as unique individuals, but most of us die a copy of someone else.' What he meant was that we tend to live up to the expectations of others, becoming like them, instead of listening to our unique voice.

So, how do we avoid this boulevard of broken dreams? Simply put, we need to switch from ‘I have to’ to ‘I want to’. When listening to yourself, how much are you using: ‘I have to’? On a deeper level these are the things you are not fully taking ownership for. It’s easier to say: ‘I have to go home early to pick up my kids’. Owning your action, you would probably say ‘I want to go home early to pick up my kids’. And when you own your action, you would also add ‘and I will finish my work later this evening’. Interesting, isn’t it? We tend to avoid discussions by blaming the system, opening times of the kinder garden, expectations of our parents or even our boss for what we must do. Instead of reframing it to a meaningful ‘I want’. So, what do you want? What do you really want?

1.3 Become who you are

It is therefore important to invest in yourself, in your own self-awareness. In the turmoil of everyday life, we sometimes exhausted ourselves. Dealing with the many choices, increasing work pressure, or even stress often keep us away from moments of rest, meditation and reflection. Despite of the fact that we sometimes crave for the real life instead of being lived. By planning this reflection time and reconnecting it with your own vision, passion, values and talents you create direction for yourself again. It helps you ‘become who you are’, instead of following the expectations of others. If you don’t decide where you’re going, there will always be someone else who will. The diagram is designed to reflect on your inner compass. Sometimes you need to wake yourself up to ignite the journey of becoming who you are.



We like to conclude by saying that a thriving spirit is a free spirit, a creative spirit, a loving spirit, a spirit fighting for the good cause. In other words, a human spirit. We all have a role to play in this world. Sometimes this means we need to wake up or break free from how we live our life right now. Maybe we need to free our spirit from the effects of painful experiences, unhealthy relationships, violent labeling. Maybe you’ve just been running so hard that you forgot yourself and what is important to you in the process. We love the quote: ‘everybody said it was impossible, then someone came who didn’t know that and did it’ We invite you to reflect on your inner compass in such a way that it reignites your spirit. That it makes the impossible possible, that it opens new doors, new ways leading to a fruitful life. In the next chapter we will dive deeper into how the brain works and how you can keep focusing on what you want to do to keep following your thriving spirit.



Focus on what you
can control, and don't
waste energy on the
things that you cannot."

- unknown

2.0 Brain power



2.1 Selective perception

The behaviors you demonstrate and habits that you've grown accustomed to in your life, are wired in networks of neurons. Your behavior is shaped by all your experiences, interactions and learnings. They shape how you perceive reality and how you act accordingly. You will not find a single person out there who thinks exactly like you do. And as a result, nobody sees reality the same way. This has to do with selective perception. Our brain absorbs far more information that it can process, so it needs to select. And how does our brain select? It filters down the information to what's relevant, and since the first order of the brain is survival, it will always look for abnormalities and danger. These abnormalities and dangers are based on our database of past experiences, education, upbringing and prejudices. So, in a way we see what we want to see, or as Anaïs Nin said: 'We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are.' In other words, because it wants to survive, our brain loves predictability. That's also why it is so hard to change our thinking patterns.

And, as our behavior emerges from the way we perceive things, it's essential to start mastering our perception. Once our perception of reality becomes fixed, it's difficult to learn and adapt. Our suffering begins when we hold onto certain experiences by either clinging or avoiding. Clinging is when we have experiences that are so great that we crave to experience them again. And when we don't, we suffer. We can of course cherish a beautiful memory, if we don't crave for repeating it all the time. Avoiding is when we have experiences that we do not want to experience again. Therefore, we avoid and resist certain things, places and people. When we do get reminded of those past experiences, we suffer. Therefore, our brain is sometimes fixated to relive or avoid certain events. How we deal with this fixed mindset is an essential part of using our full brain power.

The most profound perception is the one on self-worth. It is formed by the positive and negative interactions picked up by the subconscious during childhood. As humans, we tend to develop an identity conflict. We all desire unconditional love and acceptance. Others cannot give us enough of what we long for, resulting in a fear that we are not what we should be. We then 'change' ourselves until we get what we long for. Resulting in a subtle fear that people will discover who we really are, and we then lose their friendship and connection. Again, this requires profound conversations with yourself, because what you believe about yourself always becomes true.

In this chapter we will dive deeper into cultivating a growth mind, dealing with our limiting beliefs and increasing our focus and concentration in order to make use of our brainpower.

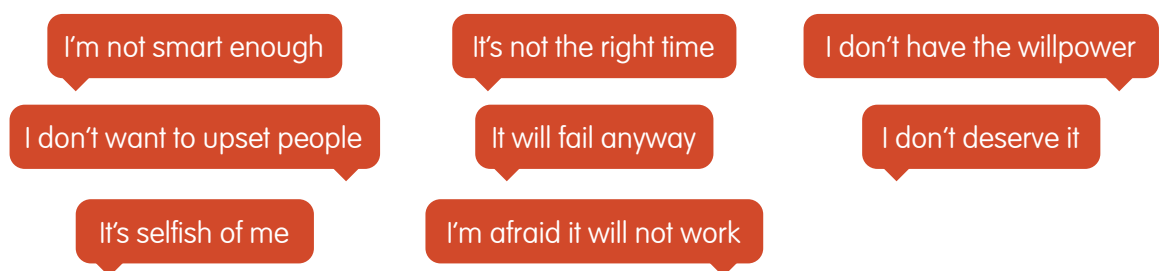
2.2 Adopting a growth mind

One of the most influential mental constructs is the way you look at yourself. A lot of us experience inner dialogs like 'I'm not enough', 'I'm not doing enough', 'I'm not good enough' or even 'I cannot

be loved'. This then often results in a constant pressure to compensate, to strive, to do more. We create an identity around possession, fame and what others think of us. Our attention shifts towards external influencers instead of what's alive in ourselves. Not addressing those inner dialogues will influence the perception of yourself, and in time override who you really are and thus can become. Becoming your authentic self and attracting a more thriving life is limited by your own thoughts and beliefs. It might therefore be wise to shine some light on how you think about yourself and what you believe about yourself, addressing those limiting beliefs that are holding you back. In order to change limiting beliefs, we need to change our subconscious programming. We need to ask ourselves if these beliefs are our own, or the beliefs of others imposed upon us. And of course, some of these beliefs we've adopted helped us in the past, but are they still serving us now?

According to Stanford psychologist, Dr. Carol Dweck, a mindset is a perception that people hold about themselves. A fixed mindset assumes that one's character, intelligence, and creative ability are static givens. We often link this to staying in your comfort zone, avoiding challenges, giving up easily, not going the extra mile, avoiding criticism and feeling threatened by the success of others. A growth mindset will take you to the magic zone. That's where growth, learning and success emerges. It's where you embrace challenges, persist in the face of setbacks, go the extra mile, learn from criticism and find inspiration in the success of others.

So, how does it work? How do you make the jump from playing not to lose to playing to win? It starts with exploring in depth where we are clinging onto or avoiding past experiences. This is where we will find our limiting beliefs. Beliefs that are limiting us to take the leap. When you reflect on a moment where you needed to get out of your comfort zone, what kind of negative chatter was going on in your mind? Do you recognize some of the following thoughts?



These are limiting beliefs based on past experiences. They are very real to us, but often irrational. So, the first step is to ask yourself if the belief 'is really true'? Then go deeper and ask yourself where the belief comes from. Once you understand where it comes from, you can think of ways to reframe your belief and see what happens when you start operating from this new belief. Wayne Dyer said: 'When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change.' When you set your mind to what you want to achieve beyond the problem or obstacle, like a laser sharp focus, this power will help you achieve the impossible.

To change limiting beliefs into empowering beliefs, you will have to identify, override, and replace these beliefs, and combine them with habitual exercises to recondition the mind. Rewriting the program is not enough, you need to condition it. A one-time action won't enforce lasting change. Yet, you need one memorable moment where you decide to change and that no limiting thought or emotion will hold you back. Like Gandalf yelled on the bridge: 'You shall not pass!' This must be felt and experienced. Especially when it looks very different from your current life, meditating about the result, giving in to the feeling of success and repetition are important ingredients. Repeat this throughout the day as though you are learning a new skill or building a new muscle. Recondition it into your mind. So, let's focus on what thoughts and beliefs will serve us in the future we would like to live in.

Remind yourself each time a limiting thought comes up. Because if you accept, believe and surrender to those thoughts, you're living in the past. Whenever you say, 'I cannot do this', simply add the word 'yet', and experience the possibilities this three-letter word gives you. Also, add it to sentences of those around you and help their minds shift as well. When meditating about acting in a new way, based on new beliefs, your brain physically changes as if it already happens. Neuroplasticity teaches us it's possible. So, here is where you create new neural pathways, brain changes by firing and wiring new neural connections in your brain. You're installing the neurological hardware to create a behavior change. That's how having a growth mindset works.

Therefore, we underline the importance of working on positive self-awareness. We all need to embrace the fact that we are gifted, competent and loved. Sometimes were not in the right context, or our role or timing is off. But that doesn't mean that we need to work hard to feel better. It therefore helps to meditate on who you really are, what you're good at, what you stand for and what you love to do. Working from who you really are is so much more rewarding. And you become more powerful believing in yourself.



Watch your thoughts, for they become words,
watch your words, for they become actions,
watch your actions, for they become habits,
watch your habits, for they become your beliefs,
watch your beliefs, for they become your destiny."

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

2.3 Concentration and focus

Staying on task can be difficult, especially when you're surrounded by a lot of distractions. It's crucial to be able to direct your mental focus in order to get into the flow you need to get things done. So how do we train the mind in concentration and focus. Here are some things to consider:

Eliminate haste from your life

'How are you doing?' 'I'm really busy!', we answer. We are often too busy to really live up to our creative potential. A lot of us have what is called 'haste sickness'. Do you recognize standing in line at the supermarket, checking the other lines to see if you would have been faster in another one? When in haste, it's difficult to focus on the task at hand. A lot of chatter in our minds is going on about what we should have done, what we should be doing, or spending time on what ifs. This gives us even more stress. Deep down it's like we're missing out on something. To speak the words of Robbie Williams: *'I just want to feel real love, feel the home that I live in. I got too much life running through my veins going to waste. My head speaks a language I don't understand.'* The only way to eliminate haste is to slow down, walk more slowly, sit on a bench in the park and do nothing. Again, it's about acknowledging the thoughts causing the haste in your life. And making a conscious choice not to listen to them anymore. Just be present, smile at the cashier, connect with what you're doing. Over time you will discover the power of inner peace.

Plan for 'distraction free zones'

Did you know that it takes around 15 minutes to get your brain into a state of flow? That's why distractions are so bad for concentration and productivity. Some of us never get into brain flow because of the many distractions. It's those days where we have been very busy and still have the feeling you didn't do a lot. So, beware of the zigzag of flow. Plan distraction free zones in your day for tasks you need your full creative brainpower. It takes some time to get into the flow zone. Most people check out just before that moment. And there is always a distraction available.

Become more aware of your breathing

Research shows a strong relation between heart coherence and breathing. HeartMath institute says that in states of psychophysiological coherence, there is increased synchronization and harmony between the cognitive, emotional and physiological systems, resulting in efficient and harmonious functioning of the whole. In other words, when we train the way we breathe, we become more effective and focused. So, it helps big time to do breathing exercises to reduce stress responses in the body.

Take (short) breaks

When you're doing something that requires a longer period of concentration, it helps to take short breaks. Research shows that taking your mind off something for a short time increases your effectiveness and mental focus. Even a three minute change of focus has that effect. So, it's good to leave a full focused state for short breaks. We'll address this more in depth when we talk about our physical renewal capabilities.

Change unproductive habits

We define an unproductive habit as an unproductive automatic response. Each pattern consists of a sequence of thoughts, sensations and behavior. The critical first step to changing unproductive responses is understanding the different components of those responses. Instead of automatically falling into unproductive thinking patterns, focus on accepting your bodily sensations and zoom in on your unproductive thinking patterns. Here are a few examples. Thoughts like ‘why did this happen to me’, going through disaster scenarios, recycling old solutions, fantasizing, ruminating what happened. When we talk to professionals the most common unproductive thoughts are: ‘It needs to be perfect’, ‘I need to be strong’, ‘I need to be loved’, ‘I need to be competent’ and ‘I need to be quick’. It’s good to dispute those unproductive thoughts. Otherwise, unproductive thinking will automatically lead to unproductive behavior. This can be part of training your ‘mindfulness’ to deal with feelings and habits.

Ability to say yes

When we say yes to something, we also say no to something else. Sometimes it’s to ourselves, when we’re so busy that we deny ourselves the things we like to do. It’s often easier to say no to ourselves than to others. We believe that the art of saying no begins by asking yourself what is really important to you. What do you decide to say yes to? Then saying no or delegating becomes easier. You will better know the difference between urgent requests and things that are truly important to do. Somebody once asked me who were the most important people in my life. I answered my family, my friends and my colleagues. Then he confronted me and asked me where I was in this answer. I should be on top of that list. So, the most important person is you. If you don’t treat yourself well, how can you be there for the people you love.

Freedom comes when you realize that just because you have a thought, it doesn’t mean the thought is true. Take a breath and experience the sense of relief and freedom, because you can decide the meaning you assign to whatever thought you have, or to whatever anyone might tell you, including this whitepaper :).



You have power over your mind – not outside events. Realize this, and you will find strength.”

- Marcus Aurelius



Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people will not feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine. And as we let our light shine, we unconsciously give others permission to do the same.”

- Marianne Williamson



3.0 Emotional agility

3.1 From striving to thriving

A lot of us are so busy striving. We're always running, sometimes near exhaustion. We're trying to get everything right. Our jobs, our marriage, our parenting, our friendships and even our social responsibility. Why are we running? Did it ever occur to you that we are running to escape our inner selves, striving to get noticed, to get loved? And in the meantime, the striving is only taking us further away from whom we really are. We feel that something is missing, a grinding fear we try to avoid by doing even more.

We would suggest taking a break, being silent and to start feeling whatever you feel. Because being at ease with your own emotions, owning them and interpreting them, makes all the difference in being emotionally agile. Agility isn't about being rational, logical and stoic. It's about being able to guide your emotions, using your emotions without giving them the power to dictate your behavior.

3.2 Healthy emotional housekeeping

Emotions are the source of movement. Emovere literally means to move away from. When we talk about emotional agility, we often talk about how to handle and change difficult moments in life. We would also like to highlight the importance of growing a healthy emotional housekeeping. Because they are the source for healthy relationships. Dysfunctional behavior comes from trying to avoid painful emotions by placing the cause of your emotions outside yourself (projection) and thus losing the connection with yourself and the other. For example, we say: 'you make me angry' or: 'when you do that, I will get upset'. We often hold others responsible for how we feel. You alone are responsible for how you feel. Blaming others is a way to protect yourself. A way to avoid taking responsibility or having to change something yourself. It's always easier to tell others what they need to change, instead of taking the road inwards. Some of us started to believe at a young age that we are responsible for the emotions of others. For example, because our parents made us responsible for their anger. Healthy emotional housekeeping is all about owning your emotions and knowing the needs and drivers that trigger them.

It is also healthy to invest in your emotional household. Research shows a connection between having strong emotions like fear, rage and anger and the weakening of the immune system. When emotions are not dealt with and expressed in a proper way, there is an excess of epinephrine which weakens the immune system and causes susceptibility to disease.

3.3 Dealing with uncomfortable emotions

Trying not to feel something doesn't work and trying to numb your feelings is an even more dangerous route. The strategies we apply to numb our feelings become our addictions in life. Whether it's gathering more stuff, winning more trophies, gaining admiration or numbing our feelings with social media, drugs, movies, gaming, work, or drinking, whatever the addiction is, nothing external will make the internal feeling go away. Every time you will need a little bit more to get the same feeling. It always takes a bigger chemical high to get the same thrill. Using the outside world to change the inner world only makes things worse. It only widens the gap between who you appear to be to the outside world and who you really are.

So, what to do? Create a life that feels good on the inside, not one that just looks good on the outside. Devote some real time on what is happening inside you. When was the last time you really took the time to really feel what you're feeling? A time where you block all distractions, close your eyes and concentrate on your inner dialogue. 'What do I feel? Why do I feel it? Why does it make me uncomfortable? What do these feelings tell me? What are my deeper needs? What do I have to learn?'

To get started, we have the four basic emotions: anger, fear, sadness and happiness. We all experience them and, based on our emotional setup, some are more present than others. Anger has a lot to do with changing reality, when things are not as they should be. Fear has to do with survival, being prudent and prepared for the unknown. Sadness and happiness are emotions about belonging and feeling connected. Not being seen, valued and loved, makes you sad. Feeling connected and valued makes you happy. Understanding which emotion is triggered, helps you understand yourself even better. And of course, it helps to broaden your emotional vocabulary. The better you can give words to what you're feeling, the easier it becomes to do so.

The reason we find it difficult to deal with uncomfortable emotions is often because we labeled them as uncomfortable. So, becoming more comfortable with your own emotions will save you a lot of energy. Let them serve as signposts to give you direction in life. It's up to you to read the signs and interpret what needs to be done.



Robbert: 'I became a top-performing athlete in multiple sports, because it was my recipe for getting love from my father. It was a very dysfunctional strategy and didn't result in him voicing: 'I love you', or even, 'I am proud of you'. However, he did show me in other ways, which satisfied enough to keep my athletic performance up. When I healed the relationship with my dad, sharing our real profound emotions, I had instant changes in my life. I lost the overextended need for competition. My core value 'competition' transformed over time into 'growth'. Growth of self in order to add more value to the lives of others. The meaning I assigned to sports changed. It went from a strategy to gain recognition, love and numbing the noise inside my head, to playing, enjoying physical activity, expressing, letting go and supporting my health'.

3.4 How to regulate your emotional reactions

Emotions are triggered by events in our life. A colleague giving us a compliment, somebody shouting at us in traffic, or kids not cleaning up their mess. We have an emotional database interpreting these events. Of course, this database consists of everything that has happened in our past. We therefore often relive our emotions by projecting them onto current events. That's why we sometimes don't understand our own emotional reaction, especially when it seems out of proportion. Knowing your emotional heritage will help you a great deal in regulating your emotions.

It becomes even more complicated than that. When we experience a strong emotion, we enter what psychology refers to as an 'emotional refractory state' (ERS). Have you ever been in a situation where a person just threw you off balance? And where you could not recover from it fast enough to respond effectively? This is the ERS at work. It is the duration of time when an emotion hinders your ability to respond in an effective and conscious way.

It helps to understand how our state of mind shifts when we are in an ERS. When we are faced with an emotionally charged situation, our conscious mind becomes less active. Suddenly, we don't have as much access to our memory and logical reasoning anymore. Everything that happens, everything other people do or say will be interpreted in a way to confirm our current standpoint. In this state we are not open for opposing arguments. We are not open for any challenge at all. We are unconsciously trying to justify and maintain our emotional state.



"It is between stimulus and response, there is a space, and within that space lies our freedom."

- Victor Frankl and Eva Eger

In this state, our focus is on confirming our current emotion, because our brain prefers this over cognitive dissonance. This happens, for example, when we are really angry with somebody. Whatever they say or do next doesn't really matter, we can often find a way to perceive it as extra evidence to justify the way we feel about them. That's why we often have the experience that a while later, when the emotional situation has already passed, we come up with the better responses. It's also why a lot of meetings at work get emotionally hijacked, with people justifying and explaining, instead of listening and asking questions.

Luckily, we are not victims of our emotions. Victor Frankl and Eva Eger wrote: 'between stimulus and response, there is a space, and within that space lies our freedom.' They remind us of the freedom of choice; How to respond in any circumstance is always up to us. No one can take that away from us. Learning how to shorten the refractory period, that is emotional agility. By acknowledging

the refractory state we are in, we can start regulating it. So, it starts by noticing our emotions, that bodily sensation often talked about as a wave of energy. We often feel it in the gut just beneath our solar plexus. Our heartrate increases, we begin to sweat and logical thinking leaves the building. When this happens, we have 2 options:

- 1 Release the emotional energy by doing something physically, like drinking a glass of water. Or ask for a short recess of the meeting and take a walk. Doing something physically helps you to reduce the stress caused by emotions. Of course, it helps to reflect afterwards on what triggered you and why.
- 2 Use the emotional energy in a good way by acknowledging your emotion, accepting that it's part of who you are and how you look at the world around you. And more important, that you could be wrong and work on your breathing to de-stress. Once you fully own your emotion, it can help to express it without blaming the other person. Then turn it around and try to find some arguments opposing your own point of view. 'What am I missing here? What could be the reason he/she is acting this way? What need is he/she expressing? What could the solution be?' This will result in a positive spiral. We use the emotion to connect and once the connection is there, the effectiveness in communication will increase as well.

To make it very concrete, training the following four steps could help you big time. Every time you feel your emotions taking over, program yourself to follow these steps:

- 1 Take your time, breathe and challenge your interpretation
- 2 Acknowledge what is being said and/or how it makes you feel, without blame
- 3 Express your positive intention and your need
- 4 Ask for possible feedback, solutions, more information, a deeper explanation

This will help you shorten the refractory state and increase your effectiveness in emotionally loaded situations.

3.5 Relating to others: The power of empathy

The neural basis for empathy is our mirror neurons. They make us feel what we observe in others. Choosing empathy over anger and fear generates a profound shift in our relationships. It increases our compassion for others, even when we disagree with them. We're often very good in voicing to others what 'they are', not in telling them how we feel about them. This second way of communicating will however help us toward more meaningful interactions. We all need to be seen, to be valued and to be loved. This is what the power of empathy can do. What would happen if we would go one step further relating with others by stating 'I feel you and it's okay' instead of 'I hear you and here's some advice'. This would generate more safety, connectivity and therefore collective creativity and healthy dialogue.

How do we exercise empathy?

- 1 **Listen actively.** By actively asking questions, listening and summarizing what people are saying, you train your ability to listen to what is said.
- 2 **Listen with your hart.** The next step is to start looking at people, especially at their facial expressions. What emotions do you see? How do they make you feel? Seeing this and expressing it will have a great impact on others. Also, because people might not be aware of it themselves.
- 3 **Listen for deeper needs.** Often it can also help to listen intuitively and to what is not said, connecting the dots to see what it is they really need. What is the need behind the emotion you notice? It's often difficult to disentangle the need and the strategy a person has to fulfill that need.

“The fact that you feel a lot could overwhelm you and even consequently make you suffer’

Some of you might also experience the downside of empathy. The fact that you feel a lot could overwhelm you and even consequently make you suffer. This then clouds your judgement and the ability to have an effective response. When this happens a lot, you need to learn how to distinguish between your emotions and those of others. That's where you want to shift from empathy into compassion. It will help you feel what others feel, be compassionate about it and then leave it with them. Because your emotional suffering out of empathy will not help that other person. A rule of thumb is that when you are in doubt whether it's your emotion or someone else's, it's theirs.

3.6 Understanding relational needs

When we link the emotion to unmet needs, the conversation shifts to a deeper level. Emotions emerge when a deep need is not met. Instead of blaming someone else for our emotion and demanding that they change, we could start to express our need and request people to fulfill that need. It's interesting to get to know your trigger points. What needs do you recognize? And how do you react when somebody disregards those needs. Here are some of the relational needs we have:

- ✓ Attention for your opinions
- ✓ Approval of who you are and your talents
- ✓ Positive words
- ✓ Affection by being intimate and by physical touch
- ✓ Encouragement to endure and reach your goals
- ✓ Comfort in tough situations
- ✓ Respect for every individual and their opinions
- ✓ Security and predictability of the context
- ✓ Support with team challenges

We know that nobody can fulfill all our needs. Why is it then that we become emotional about it? Why do we expect the impossible? We even tend to raise the bar for our leaders, expecting them to fulfill our needs. So, what to do when somebody is neglecting your needs? Of course, you can make it explicit and request them to honor it. At the same time, it's also good to let go and accept that certain people will not give you what you need. Just make sure you get it elsewhere. And if possible, from the inside, by acknowledging that you are okay.



We can only connect with others on an emotional level when we are connected to ourselves.”

We can only connect with others on an emotional level when we are connected to ourselves. When we walk away from our own emotions, or project them on someone else, it becomes complicated to disentangle what's happening inside of you. Knowing what your deeper emotional needs are, voicing them, and being receptive to the emotional needs of others will increase the quality of relationships and your emotional agility; The ability to use your emotions for your own good.



To ensure good health:
eat lightly, breathe
deeply, live moderately,
cultivate cheerfulness,
and maintain an
interest in life.”

- William Londen



4.0 Physical renewal

4.1 The core of our well-being

Physical well-being became the superficial version of vitality over the past years. Therefore, we haven't been using the term vitality much lately. Physical well-being is completely interdependent with the other three domains. Being healthy is something entirely different than 'not being sick'. It's about increasing your levels of energy, your capacity to renew yourself and thus taking care of your body to keep on thriving in life.

An important indicator of current physical fitness and biological aging is the Heart Rate Variability, also briefly discussed in the chapter on brain power. It is the measure of the beat-to-beat changes in your heart rate. It shows the function and balance of the autonomic nervous system and signals stress, rest and digestion. Our breathing patterns, our physical exercise, our feelings, and even our thoughts influence your HRV. The technology and data to measure your HRV are scientifically proven and available. The report we generate when we use this in our 'Thrivability work', gives you an insight in:

- ✓ your energy reserves,
- ✓ the productivity of your energy,
- ✓ your stress levels,
- ✓ your ability to shift from a stress response into a balanced state.
- ✓ brain wave patterns

With the insights from your HRV report you can make better informed choices about the beliefs or habits you want to transform to influence your wellbeing in all four domains.

The physical domain is at the core of our well-being. We often split it up in nutrition, movement, sleep and breathing. If one of these areas is seriously affected by your circumstances, it affects your whole well-being, leaking into the other domains. A lack of sleep may result in becoming more irritated, angry or anxious over time and thereby affect your emotional well-being. It may also cause memory loss, which in turn affects the mental well-being. And this may cause you to question your overall purpose or contribution in work and life.

4.2 Nutrition

What to eat and what not to eat is controversial. Healthy food choices are about demystifying the miraculous human body and how it responds to nutrition. Science is not even close to fully understanding the human body, with all its functions and needs. Since there is so much information out there, mostly to make you buy certain products, it's difficult to find your way. This results in a sad reality where we think we are serving our body, while actually harming it. Therefore, we always say

there are no universal recipes, because we are all different. What may work for you, might not work for me. Testing what works best for you is important. Also, when trying new popular diets, always be aware of the long-term effects on your body. We sometimes summarize this difficult theme with the 'too-much-rule'. Too much of anything is always bad.

National Geographic researched longevity in what they call the Blue zones, where people grow very old. Nutrition is among their reasons for longevity. They eat a whole food, plant-based diet. Whole food means non-processed. You will do your body a great service shifting your diet towards more non-processed and plant-based. The researchers also found out that it helps to be very mindful when you eat. So, no distractions and no haste. It will help you enjoy your food more, stimulate your digestion and prevent you from eating too much. The long-living people eat up to 80% fullness, resulting in a positive effect on their weight.

Finally, we underline the importance of drinking a lot of water. It cleanses the body, stimulates your concentration and leads to natural bathroom breaks.

4.3 Movement

Let us shift to movement. How do you feel about exercise, your daily step count, your sports routines? Is there something you like to do, and can you fit it into your day? Moving your body on a daily basis is directly related to your physical and mental state, and therefore your performance, and yes, ability to thrive. Make it a daily habit to move, to walk, to go for a work-out, anything will do. In the Blue Zones people tend to move a lot throughout the day, rather than sit all day and compensate this with an hour of working out.

For productivity purposes, there is a growing amount of research pointing to the benefits of taking frequent breaks in between work sessions, ranging from every 25 to 60 minutes. This could be a 2-10 min break. Explore what works for you. It's important to move from your desk and walk, stretch, squat, jump, basically move around. It does not have to be intense, just move. You are allowed to make it fun. When working with others, turn it into a team energizer.

The amount of 'feel good' hormones a work-out produces, is significantly stronger than any anti-depressant drug out there. So, what is the best workout? Simple, the one you enjoy and will consistently keep on doing. There is NASA that shows how jumping on a rebounder is optimal, CrossFit that claims to have figured out the optimal combination of functional physical training in one-hour workouts, including warming up and cooling down. And there is going for a run or bike ride, which is available for everyone. And when done in nature, they all should really boost your well-being. There are so many options, pick what comes naturally to you, that fits in with your routines and matches needs. For some it helps when it is enjoyed with a friend, spouse or business partner. This also incorporates accountability for those who struggle with the discipline to get out there.

4.4 Sleep

What are the most important energizers we have? Sleep, sleep and sleep. A daunting number of people suffer from lighter or heavier sleep disruption. An average healthy number of sleeping hours is 5 x 1,5-hour sleep cycles that would translate into 7,5-8 hours of sleep, but what is your magic number? Recognize that it is about the quality of sleep you get. Did you know that the sleep you get before midnight is the most qualitative? So, how is your sleep affected by your thoughts or emotions? Worries about work, family health, children's home schooling, your parents. Review what you do in your last two hours before going to bed. How much light and screen exposure do you have? Screen light lowers the amount of melatonin in your blood. It's the hormone responsible for making you sleepy. Maybe you are having emotional conversations when you're tired. The nine o'clock rule could help. No emotional loaded conversations after 9 PM. To get to sleep, you could focus on your breathing, slowing it down gradually while focusing on relaxing every part of your body. Some of us wake up in the middle of the night. It might help you to write some things down to empty your mind. Sleep may be an area where you need to adapt some healthy routines.

4.5 Breath

One of the most overlooked areas in the physical domain is our breath. It is directly related to our ability to sustain our composure, be resilient, slow down or speed up our heart, our mental and emotional health, and our ability to relax. Another fascinating fact is that 70% of our detoxification occurs when we breathe out. Detoxification from what we breathe in, but also from what we expose our skin to and the food we eat. So, in short: how you breathe matters. The simple way is to breathe into your diaphragm in a slow steady pace, meaning the same inward time as outward, without any extended pauses in between. Try 4 seconds in and 4 seconds out. Have a soft focus on your breathing and after a minute or two let it go. Repeat this for a couple of ways and see what changes. When you find yourself stressed out? Focus on your breath. You cannot be stressed when your breath is slow and steady, which makes it a very fast and effective remedy.

Keeping the body in shape increases the amount of energy and the physical renewal we need when we live a high-performance busy life. Adapting new routines in this domain have great impact on our emotional and mental capacity. It's all about the art of staying fresh.

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Men often become what they believe themselves to be. If I believe I cannot do something, it makes me incapable of doing it. But when I believe I can, then I acquire the ability to do it even if I didn't have it in the beginning."

- Mahatma Gandhi

5.0 The journey ahead



5.1 Applying neuroplasticity to our advantage

Breaking old and building new habits is crucial for thriving. You do not have good or bad habits, the law of relativity teaches us nothing is good or bad, only our thoughts make it so. Therefore, let's make the distinction that habits are either functional or dysfunctional. What determines this functionality? How they align with your purpose.

We have the possibility to change and transform. This is what we call neuroplasticity. William James: 'Plasticity ... in the wide sense of the word, means the possession of a structure weak enough to yield to an influence, but strong enough not to yield all at once.' He refers to neurons that are connected in the brain as neural networks.

To illustrate neuroplasticity, think about going for a walk in the forest. As you are walking you have the urge to walk in a certain direction. However, there is no trail. Despite a missing trail, you march into that direction anyway and in doing so you form a brand-new trail. How many other forest visitors are drawn to this newly formed trail and will choose to follow it as well? At a certain point, it is being used so often that the local government decides to place a proper asphalted walking and biking lane there. In the meanwhile, because of these newly formed lanes, another unused bike lane in the area is abandoned and broken down. This is exactly what happens in your brain when you start to make different choices, think new thoughts and take new actions. As you repeat those, you form a new neural pathway and ultimately a new neural network.

Applying the concept of neuroplasticity to your advantage is how sustainable personal change and transformation is done. So, what is the difference between change versus transformation? Change is when you anticipate on past results, so changes you make based on your reflections and contemplations. With transformation you strive towards a vision of the future, your purpose. Independent of your past and present results. Transformation is changing in a way that makes you cannot and even do not want to go back. Again, no good and bad options here, just a distinction of two strategies.

5.2 Transforming your behavior and turning it into a habit

Transformation starts with an intention to transform something in your life. An intention is a conscious decision to start doing something different to break with habitual behavior. Fresh new habits require new synaptic connections in the brain. When you want to change your behavior, you consciously need to change your subconsciousness operating system. While most of our behavior emerges from our subconsciousness. And to put it simple we have a deep-rooted operating system based on our DNA, our upbringing, our education and our experiences. So, changing dysfunctional habits based on our subconscious image of reality is not an easy task. You consciously need to choose what you are repeating into a habit. It requires deep reflection, personal connection and consistent change of actions by adopting new routines.

5.3

There are six important levers to start changing your behavior:

- 1 **Goal:** The new behavior should reinforce something you believe in. That's why it is important to reflect on what you believe in, what is important to you and what you value in life.
- 2 **Support:** Surround yourself with people that can help you. We are social beings, looking for ways to belong and be noticed. So, we need companions on our journey. Often, our social context prevents us from changing.
- 3 **Belief:** You can only change when you believe you can. Does your self-perception support your goal?
- 4 **Small steps:** You need to translate abstract goals into small concrete action goals for today.
Context: You need to adjust your physical and/or social context to the desired situation. You need to create a path of least resistance and not trust on willpower alone. Some even say that you need to put most of your conscious effort in creating a favorable context.
- 5 **Growth mindset:** You need to get into the learning spirit. Trying out new things, making mistakes, learning and adjusting is a circular process to advance.

Do you know there is a specific timeframe for changing a habit? It takes about 40 days to change neurological pathways and brain frequency. So, you need to repeat the new behavior every day for about 40 days to really turn it into a habit. Then you need another 40 days to confirm the new habit before it defines the new you. When you want to change dysfunctional habits, it's good to remember that we need to ground them in personal experience for at least a few months.

So, what is your journey forward? What inspired you? What gave you this awkward feeling, knowing that it's time to get out of your comfort zone? We hope we inspired and maybe sometimes confronted you to start living the life you are meant to live. To create fresh habits to energize your spirit, have more focus on what is important, feel the deep power of your emotions and finally become healthier in the process.

We hope this white paper is an aid in your journey to awaken your inner leader, realizing that you, dear one, are abundant, powerful, authentic and compassionate. All it takes is to step into your potential and out of the old story that no longer serves anyone. We are grateful for walking together on this journey and wish that you may turn knowledge into a thriving experience, joining our cause of humanizing the world we work in. •



Erik-Jan Hoekstra



Robbert van Ede

Become the best version of you!

Do you want to be the best version of you, or do you have questions about how to best approach some of the suggestions mentioned? Please feel free to contact us.

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- ✉ Robbert van Ede

